

THE METEORIC ADVENTURES OF COME-ON CHARLEY

By
Thomas Addison

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MR. PERCIVAL TEETERS had found a new friend, and he was sorely in need of company. Miss Dorothy Grant was the cause of it. She was the candle which Charley played the moth. He fluttered about it to the imminent danger of his wings and to Mr. Teeters' loss of his society at least three nights in the week.

Hence, when Mr. Simeon Huncks crossed Mr. Teeters' path and evinced an interest in him, the lank and lonesome private secretary felt upon that welcome gentleman's neck and clasped him to his heart. Mr. Huncks met Mr. Teeters as ten hundred thousand men have met before—he asked him for a match. It was in the Hotel Riebert roundabout. The time was the second Sunday in Lent, shortly after six o'clock at night. Charley was at the Grants'. Mr. Teeters was moping in a corner by himself, smoking a cigarette and wondering what he should have for his solitary dinner, when Mr. Huncks dropped down beside him. Mr. Teeters produced the requested match, Mr. Huncks returned his thanks, and this exchange of courtesies led to conversation. It was admittedly fostered by the sociable stranger and in ten minutes he was possessed of Mr. Teeters' history, and Charley's, from the cradle to their present point of progress toward the grave.

Mr. Huncks glanced at the clock over the desk. "Six-forty! What do you say to a bite of something—with bubbles on the side? I'm loose. Wife left for 'Frisco this morning."

Mr. Teeters hesitated. Was this an invitation or double check? Mr. Huncks seemed to sense his companion's state of mind.

"I'm buying," he announced. "When I meet a man like you—both eyes open—it's a pleasure to entertain him. You're not dated up, I hope?"

"I ain't got a thing to do but eat your dog," responded Mr. Teeters facetiously.

"I was thinking of Paul's," said Mr. Huncks, "but you have to reserve a table there in advance. It's always crowded, and I don't cut any figure with it."

Paul's? Where's that? queried Mr. Teeters.

Mr. Huncks looked at him astonished.

"You don't know Paul's? Down by Thirty-eighth street? I'll take you to a real restaurant some night this week, you and Mr. Carter. Say, down at Paul's they're so busy every night the cashier don't have time to stack the money. Throw it on the floor till after hours and counts it by machinery. I ought to know."

"Hey? How's that?" asked Mr. Teeters.

"I'm financially interested in the place, that's how," Mr. Huncks informed him. "And I'm in the hardest kind of luck, blast it. Got to sell. The madam is nuts on the Coast, and we are going over there to live. But come on in to dinner and I'll tell you about it. Maybe they've got a duck and there we can eat without an ax, and they can't fool me on the wine. I was born with a cork in my mouth."

They went in to dinner. When they came out, two hours later, Mr. Teeters, just to show that money, when you know how, could be swept up from the floor like bread crumbs, tossed a lordly quart to a bellboy who had not done a thing for him but got out of the way.

Mr. Carter came home with a rose in his coat and a light in his eyes that spoke of a rapturous evening. Mr. Teeters was waiting up for him. He was sprawled out on the couch in the sitting room smoking a black cigar to keep him awake. It was striking twelve as Charley entered.

"Thought you'd be in bed, Skeeters. What's doing?"

Mr. Teeters arose from the couch and crossed over to his chief.

"I got a hen on for you, Come-On. A nestful of eggs. It's for tomorrow night—I mean tonight; it's morning now. Don't you tell me you got another goo-goo date. This is biz—a chance to make your million."

"Go ahead," Charley said him.

He took off his topcoat, first carefully removing the rose, and sat down. Mr. Teeters perched himself on the table and swung his long legs to and fro as he talked. He reached his chance encounter with Mr. Simeon Huncks, detailed with gusto the items of the twenty-dollar dinner, that liberal gentleman had "blown" him to, and told of his connection with Paul's, with which place Mr. Teeters professed an intimate acquaintance.

"He's got to sell quick," concluded the secretary, "and he ain't going to count the beans too close."

Charley merely smiled. "Go on," he said forbearingly. "What about the eggs?"

"Ha!" ejaculated Mr. Teeters. "What about 'em? Why, they're ready to hatch, that's what! All you got to do is buy the place and clean up ten thousand a week clear profit. Huncks is doing it; he said so. And if it wasn't for his wife he wouldn't think of selling."

"Too bad," observed Mr. Carter quizzically.

Mr. Teeters hopped down from the table. His mustache wiggled, and his china-blue eyes glistened. He was plainly moved.

"You think it's another con game, but it ain't," he asserted. "Gollamighty, Come-On, it's a restaurant! It's there! You can see it—put your hand on it—eat it! It's Paul's! Everybody knows Paul's. You got to tag your table in advance or eat off the floor."

"What does he want for the place?" Charley asked. Mr. Teeters' earnestness impressed him.

"A hundred thousand. And cheap as dirt, Huncks says. Earning ten per cent on the money every week, right along! A week, understand?"

Charley failing to respond, Mr. Teeters became more urgent.

"Ten thousand a week! Do you get it? In a year you'd have half a million. Straight money, too. A regular business. Merry Moses, Come-On,

that wren—I mean," he hastily amended at Charley's quick frown, "the girl up on the avenue would be proud of you." This was a sly afterthought, and it told.

"Oh, all right," said Charley, rising and effecting a yawn. "I'll go down there with you. Nothing better to do." And he went off to bed, taking his rose with him.

In the evening of that same day Mr. Huncks called at the Riebert. He shook hands with Charley warmly.

"Heard a lot about you, Mr. Carter. Always pleased to meet a thorough fellow."

A little later they struck off down the street for Paul's.

"Hard luck you have to sell," Charley said compassionately.

"Ain't it?" Mr. Huncks wagged his head mournfully. "I suppose our friend here has told you why. I expect a party around tonight to close a deal with me. If Paul was here I wouldn't sell. But the war called Paul home to the colors—French reservist—and I had to carry on the business myself. Easy work, and I hate to quit, but the missus—you know how it is, or you would if you was married. I've simply got to give the place away and skate across to 'Frisco to please the girl."

He stopped his friends directly under a blazing electric sign, and pointed over the way. It was Paul's. A short flight of broad steps led to the lobby of the restaurant and people were passing up them in twos and threes, with occasionally a larger group.

"Seven o'clock," said Mr. Huncks. "In half an hour you couldn't push a pin in there without sticking somebody."

Mr. Huncks took off his derby to mop his forehead—he was warm from his walk—and remarked:

"I got thirty thousand dollars' worth of wine in the cellars over there, boys, from sherry to champagne. Some drink! What? Let's go over and sample it."

He replaced his hat and pioneered the way to the other side. The head waiter conducted them to a table in a corner; it was removed some distance from the others, and there was an air of privacy about it.

Mr. Huncks spoke to the head waiter.

"Same old business, Peter. Packing 'em in."

"Only fairish, sir," returned Peter with a shrug. "Monday, sir; always a little slow on Mondays."

Mr. Huncks nodded and turned to Charley.

"I've got an Air steward, my boy. Name is Frascati—Italian. I told him to get us up a dinner we'd remember. If it don't hit you right, squeal. But I'll be with you."

"Great!" commented Charley.

It was a tremendous room, gaudy with gilt and flaring frescos. At one end a piano, flute and violin were working stoccially through a popular song. Nearly all the tables were filled, and newcomers were constantly arriving. The hum of voices rose high above the music.

"Go!" said Charley. "Going some!"

The cocktails were before them, and he sipped his glass thoughtfully. Mr. Teeters drained his at a gulp.

"If I owned this place I'd sleep in it every night for fear it would get away from me," he declared.

"Don't!" Mr. Huncks begged him plaintively. "I want to forget it."

It was a rather neat little dinner Mr. Huncks served his friends. And from soup to nuts wine flowed with every course—sherry, chablis, claret, champagne, port and brandy. Never in his life had Mr. Teeters run the gamut of the wine card at one sitting like this. And neither had Charley. Ordinarily abstemious as a Quaker parson, this night the bridge slipped his hold.

Mr. Huncks was so jovially insistent, so pleasantly pressing with the bottle that Charley could not find it in him to resist. As a consequence, when they came to the cigars he looked upon the world and all therein contained with a benignant eye, and his host, especially, he regarded as a friend and brother. Mr. Teeters freely admitted his condition; he exulted in it.

"It's all lit up like the Boston boat," he proclaimed, casting a moist eye around him. "Stand me up on a table, Huncks, and save the gas."

Mr. Huncks was about to reply in kind to this waggery when he caught sight of two men who had just entered. He frowned and said:

"The devil! Here comes Wiggins."

"Wiggins?" questioned Mr. Teeters.

"The man who's going to buy me out. And he's got his lawyer with him. I told him ten o'clock. He can't wait. I guess. Say, you boys don't mind if we fix the business up right here, do you? We won't be five minutes. Sit tight and smoke. It is the edge of the evening yet."

But Mr. Teeters would not sit tight.

"Keep 'em away! Shoo 'em off! We got a speech to make," he yapped.

"What do you mean?" Mr. Huncks stared at him blankly.

"Come-On, you ain't going to let this get away from you, are you?" demanded Mr. Teeters feverishly. "Too late, Skeeters. Higgins—Biggins—what's his name—Giggins? He's got the call."

Mr. Huncks leaned over and spoke earnestly.

"I'd rather sell to you, old man, than to Wiggins. You're a friend—gentleman—thoroughbred. If you want to buy maybe I can fix it. Quick! They're here!"

Charley made a large gesture of acquiescence. He felt that way.

"Fix it," he said.

Mr. Huncks drew the two aside, and they conversed vehemently for a few moments. Mr. Wiggins gestulated angrily, and at length, shaking a threatening finger under Mr. Huncks' nose, he turned and marched away. Whereupon Mr. Huncks brought the other man over to the table and introduced him.

"Mr. Carter, Mr. Teeters—Mr. El-



THE BITER BITTEN

liott Jones. A lawyer. He'll fix our little matter up in a jiffy. The papers are all drawn. Only has to substitute your name, Charley, and I'll tell you—show how far I'll go for a friend—it cost me five thousand to buy Wiggins off. He's so mad his bottle don't fit him. Tony, bring us a bottle. Pink Seal, and shoot it along."

Mr. Carter and his secretary breakfasted in their rooms the next day. It was ten o'clock. They were not feeling very well.

Charley on arising had taken Dor-

ing results. When he took his departure Mr. Teeters, who had contained himself only by the most heroic effort, fell over on the couch squealing in dismay.

"We bought a bubble and it's busted! It was a phoney bunch of dinner sharks Huncks rang in on us last night—a free-for-all."

"Sure," said Charley. "Pretty slick. Got to hand it to him."

He was grinning. Frascati's call had cleared his head. The humor of the thing appealed to him. He had let

himself be taken for thirty-three months' rental on that morgue—\$12,000! Sell the lease for what it will bring; that's my advice to you."

"Will think it over," returned Charley. "Want you to take dinner with me tonight. Paul's. Teddy Ball's coming. And Joe Link. Already phoned them. My treat. Own the grub, anyway. What's left?"

He grinned again and went away, leaving the portly advocate sputtering in his chair.

Charley drove around to William



"Glad to see you," he greeted the beefy trickster.

thy's rose from the glass on his dresser and put it out of sight. He could not bear to look at it. It seemed to him just then he could never face Dorothy again. And he had an engagement to dine at her house that night!

The telephone rang sharply. Mr. Teeters jumped and put his hands to his head.

"Helaine!" he whined. "That girl is too almighty sudden. I thought somebody'd hit me!"

He got up sluggishly and answered the call.

"Come-On," he announced, "a guy named Catty—or something like that—has blown in downstairs. He's from Paul's. Says you told him to come around this morning. Want to see him?"

Charley had no remembrance of the appointment, nor of Mr. Catty—or whoever it was—but he was not minded to betray himself to his secretary.

"Sure," he said sententiously, and bit into his toast.

The caller was a weedy, sallow person with a little black mustache. He carried a leather portfolio, and handled it when he sat down as if it were filled with lyddite or some other high explosive—and so, shortly, it proved to be in its effect on Charley.

To reduce a painful episode to its elements, it was Mr. Angelo Frascati, the steward at Paul's, who presented himself to the new proprietor. He delicately reminded Mr. Carter—perceiving instantly the need of it—that he, Mr. Carter, had been pleased the night before to retain his, Frascati's, services. And he furthermore recalled to Mr. Carter's mind that he, Frascati, had intimated there were certain matters of importance it would be well for them to take up together without delay.

To all this Charley listened stolidly, and then requested Mr. Frascati to "get busy." This the gentleman proceeded to do, and with the most

Huncks get him drunk—for the first time in his life—and unload on him a dead business as easily as dumping sand from a cart. It was straight, too, up to a point.

It was a pretty slick game Huncks had played, and no doubt he had cashed his hundred-thousand-dollar check and was chuckling over it at that minute. He had not said a word about the liabilities—the overhead expenses, wages and like trifles, and Charley had not thought to ask; he forgot such things were. In plain terms, he had been an ass who had not even brayed.

He went to the telephone. Mr. Teeters sat up on the couch groaning dimly.

"What you going to do, Come-On?"

"Get Mr. Drew. Advice," said Charley.

While Charley talked with the attorney Mr. Teeters drew a chair to the table, stuck his fingers in his ears, and studied the memoranda Paul's steward had left with them.

In brief, Mr. Carter had purchased for \$100,000 spot cash debts of \$3,000, had assumed a three-year lease at \$48,000 a year, and had incurred running expenses of approximately \$2,000 a week. In exchange for this he had received a thousand dollars in supplies and the furnishings. The "good will" was an asset that lay entirely in Mr. Huncks' imagination, and was perceptible only to himself. Altogether, it was a tidy stroke of business—for Mr. Huncks.

As this percolated into Mr. Teeters' intelligence he raised his head and was perceptible only to himself. Altogether, it was a tidy stroke of business—for Mr. Huncks.

"Bring them all," Mr. Grant enjoined him. "Joe Link, the box fighter! I know him well, and glad I do. He's square, and that's a man's measurement wherever you find him. Dorothy will delight in him. Perhaps—"

He laughed proudly—"you've discovered she's not just like other girls."

"I have," said Charley gravely. And so it came to pass Paul's entertained a special dinner party of seven on the first night of Charley's incumbency as proprietor. Mr. Grant sat at the head of the table. Charley was on his right and Dorothy on his left. Next to her sat the renowned

street to see Mr. Grant. He had made up his mind to tell him the whole story. A man who would allow himself to get drunk and play the fool was not entitled to associate with a gentleman's daughter. He would ask Mr. Grant to withdraw the dinner invitation for the evening. He explained to Dorothy the reason.

It was with a very serious air he entered the Grant estate offices. He was shown into Mr. Grant's private room, and he went to the heart of his visit without preamble. The millionaire listened with an odd expression. His keen eye never left Charley's face. At the close he said quietly:

"Suppose you leave it to my judgment to tell Dorothy as much of this as I think fit. And as for dinner tonight, we will call it off at my house and try Paul's. I'd like to look the place over, and I know Dorothy would. It is my party, understand. No argument."

This wholly unexpected turn to the affair took Charley aback.

"By George! I say, Mr. Grant! I didn't hope for this," he stammered. "It's fine of you, sir."

The other gave him a kindly glance. "It was rather fine of you, my boy, to come to me as you did. And I'd lay odds you won't overstep the mark again."

"You can't lose," Charley assured him earnestly. Then he bethought himself of the invitations he had extended for the evening. "Gee, I'm in a fix," he added, and explained the situation.

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Joseph Link, a little conscious of his evening clothes, and "taking the count," as he would have phrased it, the girl's pervading charm. Mr. Teeter was seated by Mr. Link, and Mr. Drew and Teddy Ball, of the Evening Scream, sat across from them.

"Charley's best move is to close up and sell the lease," said Mr. Drew. "Let us talk it over," suggested Mr. Grant, who had a reason for it. "It looks like a bad bet, but I've seen a long shot win more than once. What do you say, Dorothy?"

Miss Dorothy Grant had maintained an unusual silence up to now. She had been studying the place with a speculative eye.

"I have an idea," she announced. "Do you want me to tell it?"

"Sure," said Charley eagerly. "I'll wall and call this room with longleaf yellow pine—the heart of the wood, wonderful of grain. I'd have a red brick floor, smoothed to a perfect plane. Over there at the upper end I'd have a fireplace—old Yorkshire—a big you could put a bed in it. It should have a crane, and settle by it, and a flambeau on either side, and oak logs burning when the weather called. And I should have a flambeau around the walls. Pine cones, each an electric bulb, should star the ceiling. I'd have rustic tables and chairs—not the scratchy kind, but solid, sure, without a nail or joint to catch on, and I'd have other things—I can't decide on them now—and, oh, yes, in that far corner I'd have the music concealed behind a screen of woodbine; and if they played above piano I'd discharge them. And with all this I'd have a service so absolutely faultless you'd go away in a dream of satisfied desire. She laughed.

Joe Link spoke Moucha's brusquely emphatic. It was his first remark.

"Faith and I'm thinking the lady's rung the bell."

"What would you call the place?" questioned Teddy Ball. "Paul's is a Jonah now."

The little frown came back between Dorothy's violet eyes.

"In all this rush and hurry here—all the uproar and confusion—we ought to have something opposed to it, something—How would 'Restawhyle' do, spelled with a y to make it odd?"

Mr. Drew offered no comment. He was counting up the cost. It was a gloomy outlook to him. He did not like it. But Mr. Grant was not so inclined.

"It sounds rather good, Dorothy, as you've outlined it," he acknowledged. "But how about the cuisine? Your Restawhyle will have to set a pace, and you can't beat Moucha's much on a mousseline de saumon or a supreme de volaille."

"Oh! that gibberish!" cried Miss Dorothy with right good reason. "We're going to eat English in our restaurant, dad. If you want a fried egg you'll get it—not an oeuf frit. We are going to have some things here those men down in Wall street will come running for—things they've heard about and read about, and never had a chance to try. She glanced around the table and explained: "We are from the South—Georgia. I'll bet you—"

Dorothy was no linguistic prude—"you don't know what Hoppin' John is, or beaten biscuit, or barbecued red snapper, or egg bread, or sweet potato pudding, or rice puffs, or baked—"

"For heaven's sake stop!" begged her father. "You've ruined my dinner."

"You see," Dorothy nodded triumphantly at the others. "He's only one. And there's a million like him—people who live here and come here. He'd give \$50 right now for a corn pudding like Old Mammy Jane used to make. Of course, we shall have the regular dishes—all the usual parade—but you wait till a good black Georgia ducky, with honey in his voice and a bow a courtier couldn't copy, draws out your chair and sits you down to golden waffles in the morning and chicken gumbo at night! See if you won't come back and bring the folks."

"By George!" exploded Charley. "Wish I could see Huncks. Shake his hand. Did me a good turn."

"Will you plan to boss the job?" He shot the questions at Dorothy impudently.

The girl laughed and looked at her father.

"I'll give a helping hand," he smiled. "I'll send Sam down to Macon to get your dainties for you, old timers, gentlemen in black. And I'll loan you Sam, to start off with, for head waiter. He will know how to handle the crew; everybody couldn't do it. As for Sam himself, he's a cash asset. He could seat an emperor and make him feel it was a favor."

"There's a thing we've forgotten," observed the former head waiter. "It's the drink. We can feed a man and he'll be happy. But if we want to make him loosen up—begging the lady's pardon—and take the rubber off his roll, put a drop of something warm before him with a tickle to it. He'll buy balloons to pelt the stars with. Not—"

he added, heavily apologetic—"that I'd be casing stones at any good friend of mine. God forbid!"

A burst of laughter greeted this from every one but Dorothy. She did not laugh.

"We shall have those things—all the wines," she said to Mr. Link. "I'll course. And I'll put 'tis a better thing I have in mind. One drink! A friend has just invented it. A secret he holds it, and well he may. I've traveled far, little lady, but never did I see the Gates Alar—wide open. In Mickey Morrison's new brew. 'Twas last night, and the memory is strong upon me yet."

"What does he call it, Joe?" Mr. Grant was also interested.

"He calls it," Mr. Link replied, with the solemnity befitting the birth of a new drink in a weary world. "he calls it, Mr. Grant, the 'Feather Flip.' Ask me no more, sir."

Dorothy laid her hand on Joe's arm. The big man thought a dove had alighted on his shoulder.

"You will bring Mr. Mickey Morrison to us—here—at 10 o'clock to-morrow morning," she commanded him. "We want the Feather Flip, and we'll advertise it. We are going to spend on this new restaurant—how much, Mr. Carter? Advertising and everything?"

"No limit. A hundred thousand. Two. Anything you say," Charley told her.

"Whoopie!" hurrahed Mr. Ball. "Watch the Scream!"

Mr. Drew suppressed a groan. His trade did not incite optimism.

Your bred-in-the-bone New Yorker is a person who thinks he leads, but is usually led. He follows the crowd; he doesn't always know why or for what, but he does—as one chip in the current follows another. It was the case with Come-On Charley's Resta-

whyle. The stream set in that way, and every little individual canoeist paddled with might and main to keep up with—his fellows.

The place was closed for a month, during which men worked night and day effecting the alterations Dorothy had planned. The week before the opening the newspapers and billboards blazed with advertisements of the new restaurant. Feather Flip, in especial, became a household word. Charley spent \$50,000 in thirty days on this advertising campaign, before and after opening.

Mr. Grant gave a stag party the first night. Teddy Ball estimated eighty millions were represented at the table. They were men one knew, and it made a story.

Dorothy gave a dinner the following night. And this made another story, for the daughters of \$200,000 graced the board.

People read, and came to see for themselves. They ate of dishes they had never heard of before—the great majority—and drank Mickey Morrison's Feather Flip. And Sam? He was an institution. Men swelled visibly under the benison of his attentions, and women blossomed under it—they were ravished with the place because of it.

In a week Restawhyle was the fad of the season. And it was the only place in town where you could get a Feather Flip. I owe fought for the tables. It was served only there—there was no standing bar—and it cost \$1 a drink. Dorothy knew her New York.

After the theater on a night in the fourth week of Restawhyle Miss Dorothy Grant and Mr. Carter were supping at a table in a quiet corner.

"See who's here," Dorothy exclaimed. "It had come to that between them—given name."

Dorothy looked around and bowed to Messrs. Drew, Link and Teddy Ball, who had come in and claimed a table near by.

"Where is Merciful Skeeters?" inquired Dorothy. She revealed in the name Dorothy.

"Give it up," said Charley. "Thought he was with them."

The tall Bohemian glasses were everywhere. He leaned over to the girl, his eyes glowing.

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